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SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [EAGR](#) [ZI](#)
SUBJECT: FOOD CLASHES IN URBAN AREAS

11. SUMMARY: Last week, police, national youth service members, and ordinary citizens clashed over food in two of Zimbabwe's most populous cities--Bulawayo and Chitungwiza. The two incidents signal an increased level of tension surrounding food availability and access, particularly in the case of Bulawayo where ZANU-PF youths and war veterans attacked the Grain Marketing Board depot. END SUMMARY.

BULAWAYO: ZANU-PF VS. ZANU-PF - A BATTLE FOR ACCESS

12. On January 2, police tear-gassed about 4000 people--led by ZANU-PF militia (Green Bombers) and war veterans--who had besieged the Grain Marketing Board (GMB) depot demanding transparency in the distribution of corn, according to the independent newspaper The Daily News. Daily News reporter, Chris Gande, told us that the demonstrators had complained to him that the corn was only going to the top ZANU-PF politicians.

13. Thirty-nine people were arrested on Friday, January 3, placed in custody and were being arraigned on Monday, January 6, when PolOff spoke with Gande. Gande said the Green Bombers and war veterans tried to hold another demonstration near the courthouse on January 6 but were dispersed by riot police. Gande also claimed riot police and roadblocks had been deployed on roads leading to the courthouse. (NOTE: PolOff has not been able to corroborate this last claim. END NOTE.)

14. Welshman Ncube, MDC Secretary-General and MP of Bulawayo North East, told us the demonstrators were attacked by police at the GMB depot. Ncube said demonstrators told him they were frustrated and despondent over the lack of food in the city.

CHITUNGWIZA: ZANU-PF VS. POLICE - A BATTLE FOR CONTROL

15. In Chitungwiza, ZANU-PF youth attacked police manning a corn meal queue at an area shopping center on January 5. According to Executive Mayor of Chitungwiza, Misheck Shoko, the youths wanted to control the distribution of the corn meal. Members of the public helped the police fend off the Green Bombers, who sought refuge in a nearby church. After getting reinforcements from the church members, the Green Bombers returned and attacked people and shops indiscriminately.

16. In a telephone conversation with PolOff, Shoko said he had spoken with police and asked them why they had not arrested anyone. The police claimed they could not arrest the youths and church members because they were outnumbered and would be overwhelmed. Shoko also told PolOff that some members of the church had been arrested after they went to the police station claiming that the MDC instigated the melee. Shoko--who witnessed the entire event--said there were no discernible MDC members in the area--just ordinary residents trying to buy corn.

17. PolOff asked Shoko about the mood in Chitungwiza and whether he thought additional food disturbances might be expected. Shoko said the situation is very tense but that he does not think riots will happen in the near future. He said the army is patrolling the shopping center in question and that people are too afraid to be at the forefront of a battle with the police or armed forces. Even though Shoko did not believe riots were imminent, he did think that one day the GOZ would be unable to control the frustrations and desperation of area residents and riots would ensue.

COMMENT

18. Although independent press reports somewhat overplayed these incidents, the food clashes over the last week suggest a growing popular frustration with food shortages and with profiteering by ruling party politicians with access to scarce supplies. The Bulawayo incident with ZANU-PF supporters marching on the ZANU-PF-run GMB to demand transparency in distributions is most likely indicative of

the sentiments of a larger proportion of the ruling party constituency. In Chitungwiza, the intervention of ordinary residents on behalf of the police suggests a diminishing threshold for willingness to confront their tormentors. The incidents in Bulawayo and Chitungwiza reveal the potential of growing food queues as likely flashpoints for civil unrest.

END COMMENT.

SULLIVAN